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Opinion

# Why Science Needs a New PR Rep

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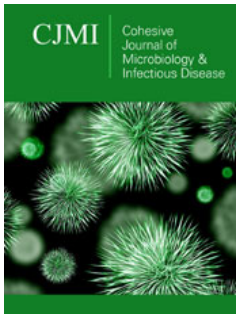


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## Opinion

As science continues to unravel intricate ideas and theories, the disconnect between science and the public amplifies. If science continues to fail to translate its findings, the public and its world leaders will continue to disregard science and its warnings. On a brisk Monday morning I sat at my desk with a warm cup of tea in hand, eagerly reading an article on performing science in space. Not surprisingly, I noticed how difficult it was to understand what was in front of me. Despite being a post-doctoral researcher in the field of microbiology, I have noticed branching out into other scientific areas can still leave me perplexed. If someone who has spent years learning science has trouble understanding the ins and outs of the latest scientific developments, how can the general public be expected to understand what science offers? There is a growing problem – the science community is failing to communicate with the general public. As a result of this disconnect between science and the public, many do not understand the scientific process or its findings. Instead, they must take scientists at their word, essentially having to believe in science. This becomes eerily similar to religion or other ideologies. As a result, there are many out there who mistrust science. From misinformed yet well-meaning parents refusing to vaccinate their children, to world leaders making incorrect decisions due to a lack of science knowledge. Admittedly, science does deal with the unknown and discoveries are often met with disregard. Facts such as the Earth orbiting the Sun or germs causing disease were once outright rejected by society. The 16th century Italian Friar, philosopher and mathematician Giordano Bruno was sentenced to death for suggesting the world is not at the centre of the universe. While in the medieval ages, tens to hundreds of thousands were killed when falsely accused of witchcraft. Flawed ideologies and biases once dictated our lives.

### Science denial in a science dependent world

Today, despite almost all human knowledge being available at our fingertips, we have regressed to relying on dangerous biases. Misinformation and fake news are rife in our world. Our once inherent curiosity as children has been driven out and replaced with dangerous old superstitions and flawed ideologies. We have gained knowledge without the wisdom to utilize it correctly. Prone to only searching for knowledge that already agrees with us, once universally accepted ideas, such as the Earth is round or that the use of vaccines saves lives, are being rejected. While Flat Earthers seem a more harmless form of science rejection, anti-vaxxers lead to deadly diseases remerging that we once had under complete control. These anti-scientific notions are present even at the highest levels of government. In South Africa during the Presidency of Thabo Mbeki, amid the AIDS epidemic, pressing and rational action was needed. Instead, the government blocked urgently needed anti-retroviral drugs to AIDS patients, instead putting forward natural remedies such as beetroot and garlic. This resulted in the death of 330,000 people. The most dangerous idea stemming from a disregard of science is humans not being able to affect the Earth's climate, despite overwhelming evidence on the contrary. The current President of the United States refuses to believe climate change reports from his own government. Meanwhile, other governments are littered with members who do not take it seriously either. Climate change threatens every aspect of our lives, action must be taken immediately to avoid disaster. This begins with elected officials understanding the science and putting into place appropriate measures.

## We need to bring out our inner scientist

In spite of the apparent disconnect between science and the public, exploring the natural and physical world is deeply embedded within us all. We are born as scientists, inherently curious about the world with an innate desire to observe and experiment with the world around us. This inclination for science has provided a vast repository of knowledge, ensuring our survival as a species, and resulting in the safest and most prosperous time in all human history. Scientific advances in medicine, engineering and agriculture have literally saved billions of lives. Most of the comforts and advantages of this modern world exist only due to the technological advances that have come about due to a scientific understanding of the world. It is apparent more effort is needed to convey science, so that more people can understand, appreciate and support it. Without public support of science, less science will be carried out and fewer amazing discoveries will be made. Despite the availability of great science communication publications out there, many are unaware of what science has done for humanity and all it has uncovered. If science is to continue to benefit humanity and unravel the universe's mysteries, the public has to be on board the journey. A better job must be done in communicating the findings of science to the public. It is relatively easy to get those already interested in science to read about it, but it will be significantly more difficult to reach the many out there who find the complexities of science daunting. Relatable and short reads about fascinating areas within science may be a good start. Science is not a perfect system; human biases can creep into the work of scientists. Yet it is the best system we have in figuring out the world around us. For hundreds of thousands of years humanity advanced slowly, if at all. Only until recently when science was embraced have, we been able to truly advance. If we are to survive into the near and far future, new technologies and discoveries created through the scientific method will light our way. If this is to happen, if science is to continue providing immense discoveries and innovations that enrich and better our lives, the public must understand science.